

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH PAPER: From Fancy to Fact: A Comparative Analysis of Owen, Fourier, Cabet and the Search for Equity in 19th Century American Secular Utopian Communities

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Utopian dreamers are often dismissed as crackpots and yet from the beginning of time the history of political society has been in large part a history of the search for a perfect society. From Plato's struggle with the definition of justice and his quest to create a just society to the thinkers of the Enlightenment and beyond, the dreams of these theorists, when translated into action by realists, had an enormous impact on the course of future political events both in this country and around the world.

In 19th century America against a backdrop of world-wide revolutions both political and industrial, several men stand out in their attempts to turn their own personal vision of a society based on justice and equity into political and social reality. Although their attempts ultimately failed, the legacy they left to future reformers and true believers in the American dream is often understated and overlooked.

Robert Owen, Charles Fourier, and Etienne Cabet each developed a plan to create a just society through the creation of small secular communities that would transform the condition of man and ultimately the world. These communities were intended to serve as models for the future in the creation of equity by manipulating the environment and

creating conditions that would finally allow all men (and sometimes women) to realize their ultimate right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

How each man defined equity and attempted to create these conditions along with an analysis of the inherent problems associated with translating political dreams into social reality is the subject of this paper. Through an examination of both primary and secondary sources, this paper traces the journey from 'fancy to fact' and concludes with an examination of the impact these three thinkers had on American political reform movements.